

Mission impossible or heroic?

Risks should have been considered

In an ideal world, the good people of America could travel to every country and offer foreign aid and Christian teachings to the poor. Two women, Baylor University graduates Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, took the initiative many months ago to travel to Afghanistan with hopes of supplying food, shelter and Christian enlightenment to the Muslim people. On Aug. 3, they were arrested and have been detained in Afghanistan, on charges of trying to convert Afghan Muslims to Christianity according to *The Washington Post*. We do not live in an ideal world, and even before the Sept. 11 attacks on America, these women strongly were discouraged to take their pilgrimage to Afghanistan. Since Sept. 11, tensions have mounted, and the hope that these women will return home becomes dimmer. Curry and Mercer are on trial with other members of a Christian aid organization, Shelter Now International. Before Shelter Now International took it upon itself to help the country of Afghanistan, heavy emphasis should have been placed on the risks involved.

The government of Afghanistan is very unstable, and at any point, ties between the U.S. and Afghanistan could have erupted, as they did on Sept. 11. On Aug. 31, *The Dallas Morning News* reported that the state department has no embassy in Afghanistan and strongly warns Americans not to travel there. The Taliban has been the ruling governmental regime in Afghanistan since Sept. 1996 when they captured the capital, Kabul. *The Dallas Morning News* also reported that the United States does not recognize the Taliban with this power and accuses them of harboring Osama bin Laden.

Last Oct. 12 the USS Cole was bombed in Yemen, and the U.S. government has since linked this disaster to bin Laden and the Taliban. All these events took place before Mercer left for Afghanistan in March, which should have discouraged her visit and been enough evidence for Curry, who already lived in Afghanistan, to return home. Since the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, strict Islamic law has dictated their government. *The Washington Post* cites that under Taliban and Islamic law, the penalty for foreigners preaching the Christian gospel is jail time and expulsion, but for an Afghan who converts to Christianity, the behavior is punishable by death. Sixteen Afghan Shelter Now workers also were arrested and said to have been converted by Mercer and according to an Oct. 16 *The Dallas Morning News* article, they are living in much harsher conditions.

The strict interpretation of Islamic law adopted by the Taliban and the condemnation of Christianity has shown people across the world that the Taliban regime is serious about Islam and will punish anyone who denounces the religion. Not only did these women follow the Shelter Now program and defy Islamic law by preaching Christianity in Afghanistan, but they also endangered those Afghan citizens by allowing them to become criminals in a perilous government.

In hindsight of Sept. 11, the consequences are much more clear, but the risks involved in traveling to Afghanistan and preaching Christianity were extremely precarious, even before these attacks.

On Oct. 6, CNN said that the Taliban offered to release the foreign aid workers if the U.S. would withdraw its threat of military strikes. This was the first time the Taliban had

linked the aid workers to the demand to give up bin Laden. President Bush responded by saying, "This is not a negotiation," and on Oct. 7, the U.S. and Great Britain began launching air strikes in Afghanistan.

As the strikes continue, so does the trial for these two women in Afghanistan. It is unknown what provoked them to take such a trip, but all America can hope for now is a safe and expedient return. Clif Mouser, the director of Ministries on the Baylor campus, described the situation faced by these Baylor graduates. "Whether it's just a couple of blocks away or in another country, students here know that this is a place to grow and solidify their faith, but it is a far cry from what they will face in the real world." Perhaps their idealistic view has been shattered or perhaps not. If only we could turn back time, then this missionary journey to Afghanistan would have never held the fate of two young women.

Cayla Carr is a senior speech communications major.



CAYLA CARR

Others should not be discouraged

As most of the news this month has focused on mysterious Anthrax discoveries, allied attacks on the Taliban and Osama bin Laden's worldwide terrorist reach, one important story has been lost in the shuffle.

Two American women remain jailed in Afghanistan on charges of preaching Christianity. Dayna Curry and Heather Mercer, both recent graduates of Baylor University, are part of a group of eight foreign-aid workers facing harsh penalties. Sadly, it is possible they will never leave Afghanistan alive. The humanitarian actions of these two Americans were selfless and noble, and they should not be forgotten or their actions dismissed.

This story is an inspiring example of the bravery of those who risk their lives daily to bring physical relief and spiritual hope to the dark and dangerous backwaters of hatred and intolerance. Despite the explosion of uncertainty and danger since Sept. 11, hopefully there will be more like

them. The murderous extremists of the Islamic world can be defeated with superior military might. But a more lasting peace can be achieved when workers, such as these, give exposure to a better way of life in the very places where totalitarian regimes violently impose their terrible visions on others and call it peace.

Before their arrest, the women had worked in Afghanistan for several months, helping in Shelter Now International's effort to provide support for abused women and food and shelter for the country's many poor. Likely, they were sharing Christianity, and likely, the Afghan people saw firsthand the freedoms of America that would allow such action as a result of the women's concern and kindness. This can help to change regimes from the inside and is as effective as any missile. And as this country faces the wrath of the contemptible, extreme evil that spews from groups like the Taliban, others should not feel deterred from sharing their faith and ideals, demonstrating the freedoms available in democratic countries.

Among other acts of terror, extremists have condemned Salman Rushdie to death, killed Marines in Beirut, sponsored suicide bombers, attacked the USS Cole and continue to threaten pro-Western rulers in Muslim countries with assassination and civil war. Saddam Hussein alone during the last 20 years, is responsible for shedding more Muslim blood than the total of Western civilization. His eight-year war with Iran and ongoing murder of Iraq's Kurdish population have killed as many as 2 million of his fellow believers. Concern for the most basic forms of human dignity demand that action be taken to support the victims of these extremist tyrants.

Only one of 18 Muslim states Turkey is governed democratically. Broadly speaking, there is not a single area of societal existence in which the West is not superior to the Islamic world, including religious tolerance, social and economic mobility and the security of rights and liberties under the law. And should someone think that is not the case, no one in America will lock them up under the threat of death. Many brave, Arab leaders live in fear of their fellow countrymen and are the enemy of the same extremists the United States is struggling against.

Unfortunately, some operate in the very Western world that is the object of such intense scorn. The spokesman for the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam party, who calls for the faithful to overthrow the government of Pakistan for the sin of cooperating with President George W. Bush, sends his own two sons to schools in the United States.

The extremists who react violently to the prosperity and freedom of open societies are holding Curry and Mercer hostage. Though not a simple task, this can change. Mercer and Curry were a part of that. The United States is not at war not with Islam, as bin Laden and his supporters claim, but with terrorism. Their fantasy of radical, imperialistic Islamic supremacy can be stopped. War has eliminated a great deal of problems in the 20th century, including Nazism, Japanese militarism and communism. Likewise, the substantial members of the Muslim world who ignore, harbor and support terrorist activity can be defeated either by force or exposure to the better way of living among civilized humanity. The spread of enlightened ideals and democracy were what Mercer and Curry bravely were living every day for two years. The millions of Muslims who are fortunate enough to live in the West already have discovered the refuge and opportunity that so many of America's newest enemy hatefully scorn.

Jonathan Jones is a senior political science major.

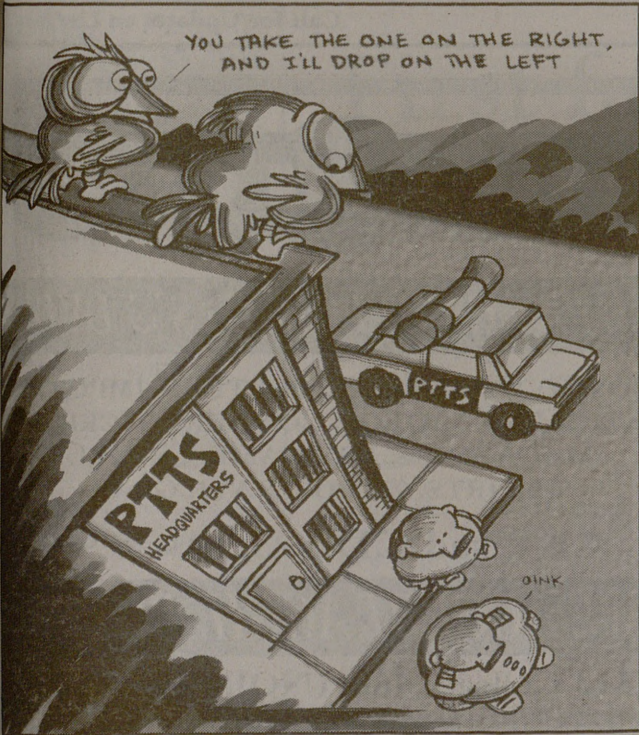


JONATHAN JONES



CHAD MALLAM • THE BATTALION

CARTOON OF THE DAY



THE DUNCARTOONIST ©

A&M competitive cheer squad is unacceptable

In response to Melissa Sullivan Oct. 16th, article:

I would like to congratulate the board of regents, the student body and Shannon Johnson, in particular. You have achieved the impossible; I no longer take any pride in being an Aggie. I chose to attend A&M because it was unique and special. I enjoyed and took pride in explaining our traditions and the Aggie way of life to my friends and family. I loved the fact that, although we were officially TAMU, we embraced the past and proudly displayed AMC throughout the campus. Then the worst idea of A&M's history came to light, the 2020 plan. For some reason, the board of regents decided that the best way to raise A&M's status was to homogenize the school as much as possible. My belief is that they acted as fools. There was one simple action that they could have taken that would have made TAMU "World Class." The needless killing of Rudder Oak. The feminization of the on-campus housing. The termination of Bonfire. The moving of Midnight Yell to 11:30. The placement of R.C. Slocum to the most

visible position on campus. The dissolution of the Fish Drill Team. The support of a cheerleading squad with a junior college membership. I do not want anybody from Blinn representing me as an Aggie.

A&M's support of a cheerleading squad is the last straw for me. A&M is now part of the great unwashed. The only thing that still makes A&M unique is the existence of the Corps and our band. I wonder how the Bugle Line will look when they are surrounded by a Flag Corp. On my Aggie word, as long as there is a cheerleading squad, I will never intentionally give a cent to TAMU again, either directly or indirectly.

Jack L. Williamson
Class of 1991

'Sidelines' is not all bad

In response to Kellin Zimmer's Oct. 15th column.

There are several factors that need to be considered before you decide to hate ESPN forever. First, the show was not intended to be a PR piece for the school. It was intended to be real. While we do have traditions that I cherish and love, I am also not naive enough to think that things like over-consumption of alcohol never occur at our school. In

addition, before you get upset because "Sidelines" does not focus completely on traditions, ask yourself why under one-fourth of the student body attends Silver Taps on a regular basis. If we don't support Aggie traditions, ESPN should not come under attack for failing to portray all of them.

No actors were hired for "Sidelines." ESPN is not making up storylines. Rather, your fellow students are providing the material for the show. The specific cast members provide their schedules for the production crew to follow each week. If you are upset about what you saw, I suggest that you take a look at who you are attacking. Is ESPN to blame for the personal decisions of cast members and their friends?

There are shows that have yet to be seen. The show is a 13 episode series. Two episodes have aired. To date, "Sidelines" has introduced under one-half of the total cast. If you are concerned about the cast not being representative of the student body, wait to pass judgement until you have been introduced to them all.

In conclusion, if you want to see a good PR piece about A&M, the visitor's center has a great video. If you are prepared to see good along with embarrassing, stay tuned to "Sidelines."

Rachel Schaefer
Class of 2003